

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF IOWA
CEDAR RAPIDS DIVISION

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,)	No. 24-CR-55
)	
Plaintiff,)	<u>INDICTMENT</u>
)	
vs.)	Count 1
)	18 U.S.C. § 641:
DENISHA CLARICE MORRISON,)	Theft of Government Funds
)	
Defendant.)	
)	
)	

The Grand Jury charges:

Count 1

Theft of Government Funds

The Derecho

1. On August 10, 2020, a severe storm, commonly referred to as a derecho, struck multiple counties in the Northern District of Iowa, as well as other parts of the States of Iowa, Illinois, and Indiana. Media reporting on the event, citing public and private sources, have estimated that the derecho, with winds exceeding 100 mph, caused an estimated total of \$7.5 billion in damage across the affected states. The derecho caused long-duration power outages across the Northern District of Iowa and the larger region, millions of acres of crops were damaged or destroyed, and numerous semi-trucks were blown off major interstate highways.

2. The Northern District of Iowa was particularly hard-hit from the derecho. The derecho swept through Linn, Jones, and Cedar Counties, with

estimated 100-130 mph straight line winds and a maximum measured unofficial wind gust of 126 mph at Atkins, Iowa, in Benton County. According to the National Weather Service, what was unique about this event, making it even more extreme, was the long duration of the high winds. Many locations experienced sustained high winds and damaging gusts for 30 to 60 minutes, compared to 10 to 20 minutes, which is more common for derechos.

3. Just within the city of Cedar Rapids, Linn County, Iowa, within the Northern District of Iowa, power was cut to nearly all of the city's residents by the derecho, and damage estimates indicate that over 1,000 housing units were rendered unlivable while hundreds of additional homes suffered damage. Many of the city's businesses were also damaged during the storm. For the entire State of Iowa, estimates indicate that approximately 20% of the state's total farmland was adversely affected by the disaster event.

FEMA

4. In response to the disaster event, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) declared Disaster No. 4557 for the State of Iowa on August 17, 2020. Victims of the disaster who resided in the Iowa counties approved for assistance could apply to FEMA for disaster relief assistance to help meet repair and replacement expenses not covered by insurance. Linn County, Iowa, within the Northern District of Iowa, was included in the Iowa counties approved for assistance.

5. FEMA disaster relief assistance for Disaster No. 4557 (derecho benefits) are benefits authorized, transmitted, transferred, disbursed, and paid in connection with a major disaster declaration under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 5121 *et seq.* As of October 28, 2020, over \$28 million in federal assistance had been approved for counties in the Northern District of Iowa and elsewhere.

6. If an applicant met the eligibility criteria, he or she would be awarded disaster relief grants for replacement of personal property and housing assistance based upon his/her loss and need. Eligibility requirements, as outlined in Title 44, Chapter 1, § 206.101 – 206.199 of the Code of Federal Regulations, include the stipulations that a victim's primary residence and/or personal property items must be adversely affected by the disaster.

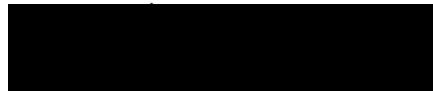
The Theft

7. In about September and October 2020, in the Northern District of Iowa and elsewhere, the defendant, DENISHA CLARICE MORRISON, willfully and knowingly did steal and purloin and did convert to her own use and for the use of another, and without authority conveyed and disposed of money of the United States and any department and agency thereof, and did willfully and knowingly receive, conceal, and retain the same with intent to convert it to her use and gain, knowing it to have been stolen, purloined, and converted, of a value exceeding \$1,000. Specifically, defendant DENISHA CLARICE MORRISON received more than \$6,500 in FEMA funds, specifically, personal property assistance and rental

assistance, after a false and fraudulent application for derecho benefits was filed in her name. Defendant's application for derecho benefits falsely represented that (1) defendant was a resident of Westdale Drive SW in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, at the time of the derecho; and (2) defendant suffered both home and personal property damage from the derecho at that address. In truth, defendant was not living in such apartment at the time of the derecho and suffered no home or personal property damage from the derecho at that residence. Defendant received the FEMA funds into an account at a credit union in the Northern District of Iowa.

This was in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 641.

A TRUE BILL



Foreperson

6/26/24

Date

TIMOTHY T. DUAX
United States Attorney

By:



TIMOTHY L. VAVRICEK
Assistant United States Attorney

PRESENTED IN OPEN COURT
BY THE
FOREMAN OF THE GRAND JURY

And filed

6/26/2024

PAUL DE YOUNG, CLERK